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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002803

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#)

SUBJECT: MFA NORTH AMERICA DIRECTOR DISCUSSES REGIONAL POLITICS, SHARON'S DISENGAGEMENT NEEDS WITH NEA DAS DIBBLE

REF: TEL AVIV 02654

Classified By: Economic Counselor William Weinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: MFA Deputy Director General for North American Affairs Yoram Ben Zeev met with NEA DAS Liz Dibble to discuss the future of Hizballah following the partial withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon; the upcoming Quartet meeting in Moscow; GOI internal disengagement politics; and PA capacity to quell terrorist activity in the long term. On Hezbollah, Ben Zeev said he believes the organization is seeking a domestic Lebanese audience, and questioned whether Hamas and PIJ elements in Damascus may eventually relocate to Beirut. On the Quartet, Ben Zeev expressed concerns that the organization is taking on a "momentum of its own" beyond its historical adherence to U.S. positions. On disengagement, he requested that the U.S. give PM Sharon the "quiet" he needs to focus solely on disengagement, including leaving aside criticisms on settlement expansion for the time being. End Summary.

Lebanon, Syria, and the Future of Hizballah

2. (C) MFA Deputy Director General for North America Yoram Ben Zeev told NEA DAS Liz Dibble May 6 that Israel shares the USG's estimation of possible "worst case scenarios" in Lebanon following the withdrawal of Syrian troops, including the concern that Syria may continue to cause trouble including during the upcoming parliamentary elections. Ben Zeev emphasized his view that Hizballah is now "trying to find its mission," working harder to appeal to a domestic Lebanese constituency and making "course corrections" in its policies. "Hizballah still needs Syria, but not as much as it once did," he said. Ben Zeev also expressed fears that those elements of the Syrian government that provide support to Hamas and PIJ may eventually move from Damascus to Beirut. In his view, this would throw into chaos the clear protocol Israel and Syria currently maintain, in which the catalogue of potential actions and responses is predictable and well known to both countries.

Sharon Needs Quiet from Quartet, U.S.,
to Carry Out Disengagement

3. (C) At the upcoming Quartet meeting, said DAS Dibble, the parties will discuss the outcomes of Jim Wolfensohn's visit to Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, and the specifics of his role as disengagement coordinator. Ben Zeev expressed the GOI's "nervousness" that the Quartet, which has historically been kept in check by the U.S., is "gaining a momentum of its own." He said he feared the statement coming out of the upcoming Quartet meeting in Moscow could be detrimental to PM Sharon's ability to carry out disengagement. Ben Zeev stated in particular that the U.S. must "ensure" the government of Russia "leaves PM Sharon alone."

4. (C) Ben Zeev reported that during the recent meeting between PM Sharon and Senators Frist and Lieberman, the Prime Minister asked for "quiet" in which to focus solely on disengagement. The U.S. must protect Sharon from internal elements that wish to see his government topple, he said, by withholding criticism on settlement activity. DAS Dibble observed that the kind of "noise" from the international community Sharon says he wishes to avoid is triggered by surprise announcements such as the one regarding E-1. Ben Zeev argued in response that Sharon must give the Israeli public "red meat" by talking about expansion of the West Bank settlements. The U.S. should recognize, however, that this is primarily talk and very little action, he said. (Note: Other GOI contacts report that planning for the E1 expansion of Ma'ale Adumim continues apace, and NGO activists note that the plan may be weeks away from public review, a stage of the approval process from which it is difficult to backtrack. See reftel. End note.)

Abbas Still Dissappoints

5. (C) Ben Zeev said that PM Sharon is "very upset" with PA

President Mahmud Abbas because of the latter's seeming inability to carry through with actions to fight terror, including seizing weapons and dismantling terrorist infrastructure. Moreover, he said, Sharon believes even Abbas' talk is not as firm as it should be. Ben Zeev emphasized that the GOI takes Abbas' words very seriously, and has been impressed with some of what he has said, but that neither his actions nor words have met GOI expectations.

16. (C) DAS Dibble cleared this message.

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